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**coraddi**

fall 1966

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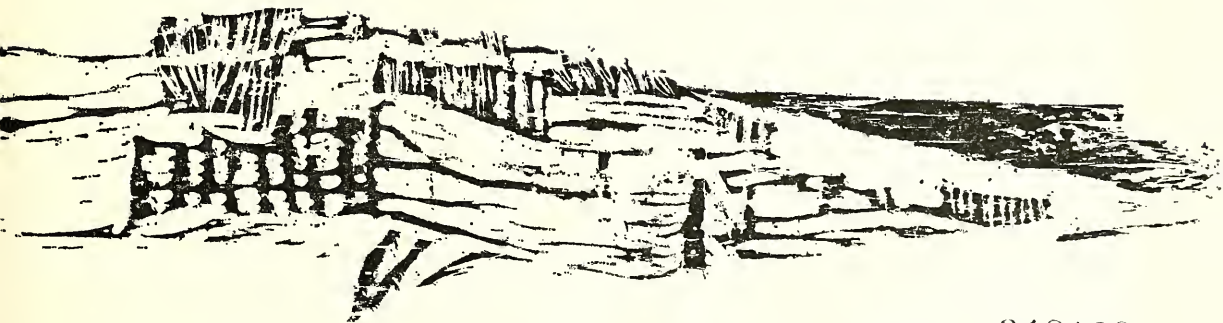
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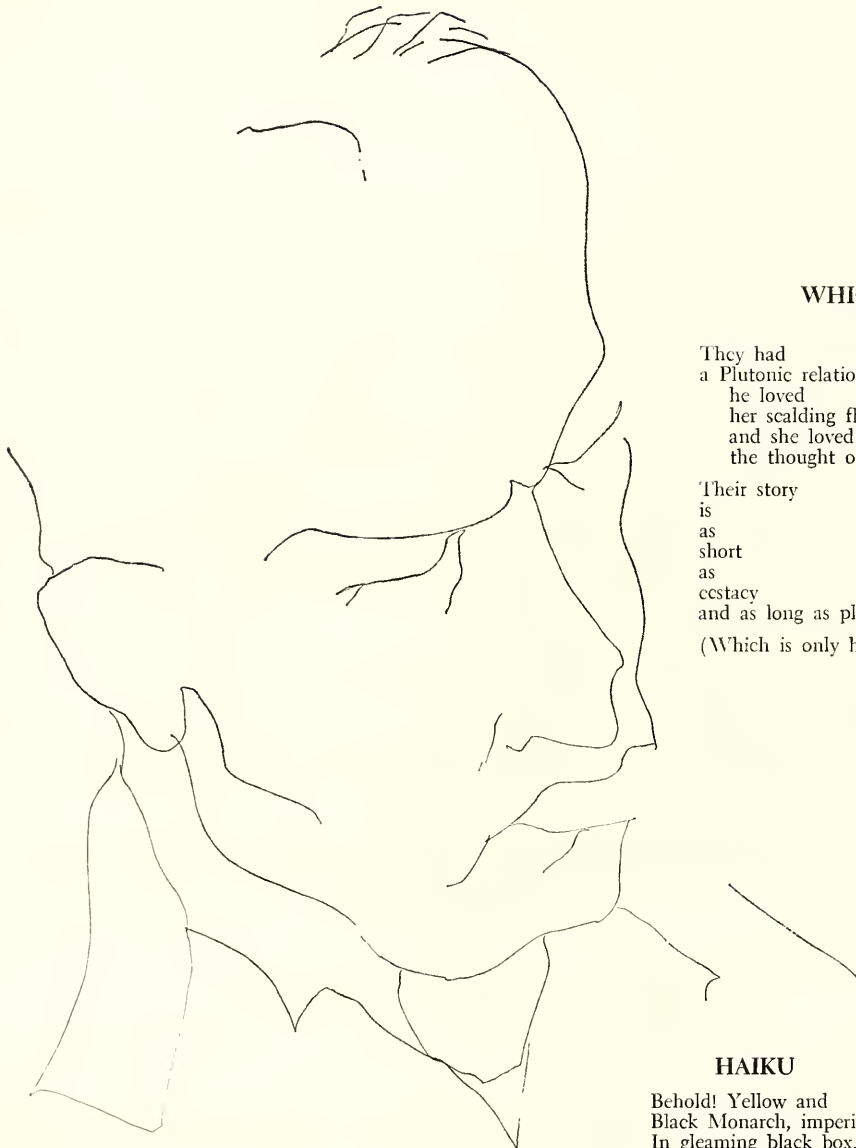
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## WHICH IS ONLY

They had  
a Plutonic relationship—  
he loved  
her scalding flesh  
and she loved  
the thought of lust.

Their story  
is  
as  
short  
as  
ecstasy  
and as long as pleasure indefinitely prolonged.  
(Which is only hell)

JAN SAMET

## HAIKU

Behold! Yellow and  
Black Monarch, imperial  
In gleaming black box.

SUSAN PAMELA CARTER

## O HUGE BLACK RUG OF DOG

I, steadily increasing week by week,  
Collide with faces, eyes I cannot face,  
And run from them as they from my disgrace  
To where I can evade them all: a creak  
Of stairs, a rush of warm air on my cheek  
And I am home. A curtain of old lace  
Will serve to hide my neighbor and erase  
The longing of the prying sun to peek.  
O huge black rug of dog, unbrushed, unfed  
This morning, and yet still content to squat  
All flattened out beside my mother's chair,  
You mongrel, being bred from who knows what—  
How can you dare to scorn my ill-kept bed  
And dress your pups in gowns of I don't care?

SUSAN SELF

## DAZZLING NOONDAY REFLECTIONS

Dazzling noonday reflections were  
slanting into darkness. The  
damp air was stifling  
when the moment  
of our love  
passed  
away like  
a quick leap in time.  
And a spring draft caught  
my nose and eyelids when  
I stepped outside.

T. K. RUTER



## RAINY SATURDAY

In rain I watch how unobtrusively  
Light shifts across mother-of-pearl clouds.  
Each ripe, wet drop through my window  
Is a silvered globe, too small  
For seeing fortunes, except its own.  
The glass teases me with mine.  
Behind me, sunning herself in lamplight,  
My dog is curled asleep, deliberately,  
Against your uncomplaining knee.  
Hedonist! She knows the place is mine,  
That soon you will stir to stir away  
Her motley, shredding silkiness,  
And so she wrings the moment of all  
Pleasure. Soon too I will be drawn  
Into the hearth-like warmth of rooms  
Sheltered against the pulse of rain.  
Coffee chortling to be drunk, the sketch  
I half-began of you, the kisses  
You keep in waiting will call me back.  
Now I am teased by fortunes in the glass.

SUSAN M. SETTLEMIRE

## STREET SCENE

The streets lie in patterned schemes  
Beneath velvet-emerald boughs  
I wonder where they lead?  
Each on its separate way . . .  
I'd allow  
The architect planned a million lives  
Along each one  
A million green shutters, weather-worn,  
Red-brick dominions, summertime-lazy,  
Pattering bare feet on cement;  
Life jammed into life  
In spite of an Allison fence.  
Marbles and jacks and metal cars  
In paved compartments, resting  
To a mower's hum and buzz;  
And the whoosh  
Of cars spinning by, smooth  
On winding, departmental city streets.  
I wonder just how many you could travel,  
And just how far you could go  
If you never stopped to rest—  
Or if you never fell in love with one.

TERRIE BAUMGARDNER

## MAN AS MATHEMATICS

Stone temples are cold and they glow  
With order and rhythm and line.  
Eight Atlases oppressed by some weight,  
(An orderly world pressing down?)  
The columns are ribbed and encircled  
Like the filleted hair—well curling—  
Of this pristine and perfect stone child  
Who never lived except in stone.  
And so he glows and so is cold  
And so repeats geometry.  
The columns and he verge on kinship  
(A little of flesh in the column  
And much more of column in flesh)  
In order and rhythm and line.

ROBERTA ENGLEMAN

## SUMMER JAZZ

*Wry melodies, diffuse . . .  
Fat, mocking-sad raindrops of song  
And sweeps of lyricism  
                  scattering.*

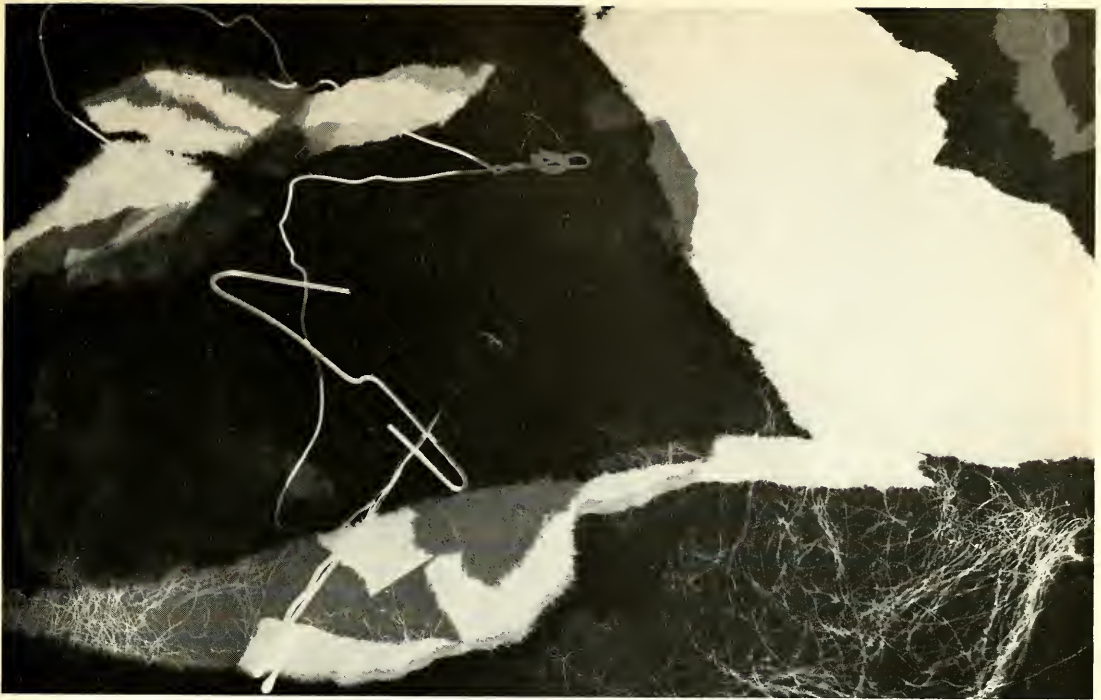
So are we these summer days  
And languishing nights. The thread  
Of tune and story hidden and  
Half-hidden in our improvisations  
On small-town summer sameness.  
Be flippant, darling.  
Make sarcasm your caress  
Sometimes.

          Sing to me  
"Gotta travel on." Then,  
In the storm-light tell me again  
I have shown you new horizons  
Of beauty—sweet liar.  
Every kiss is a compliment.  
My caress soon will be for your words  
Alone. Be flippant, darling.  
Get in your last bitch  
Before you kiss me good-bye  
And leave me drifting  
In the fading rhythms

Of song's  
end.

SUSAN M. SETTLEMIRE





## TOWARDS MIDNIGHT, AFTER THE FIRE

It seems somehow  
we are dream extensions.  
When I see you  
it is through a veil of ash.  
Your face, your body,  
and even your voice  
beckon from realms  
of nondistinction.  
Where we touch,  
ash smudges our skin.  
Deeper, deeper  
we dine in silence,  
brushing the ash  
from silver dishes.

WILLIAM KEENS

## COMPUTER MAN

Those well-turned papers lie in disarray  
Where you have belched them from your flexless jaw.  
Black blots of words and figures form the Law  
Of Mass Action upon sheer sheets, and stay  
Forever as mementos to your play.  
Computer man 'neath wheeling eyes I saw  
Your nerves of red-green blinking lights frayed raw,  
For boxed against the wall you won't betray  
Your button heart, which off could yet read "on."  
That intertwining mass of gears has clogged,  
And silence dams your depthless flowing whine.  
Your golden mind is worthless steel that's gone  
To rust where endless numbers still are logged,  
And from you hangs an out of order sign.

BARBARA LEARY



## THE CUE

by

TERRIE BAUMGARDNER

The rails were a chalk-grey color, I remember, except for where the initials had been freshly carved into the wood, and in those places there were yellowish scratches. The rails were whitewashed and salty like the wind—the wind that blew cool against your cheeks to make you feel like laughing or else whipped around you so hard you had to grip the rails with both hands for balance.

The gulls sailed with the wind, and just above your head, so that when they swooped down for a catch you could almost touch their wings. Usually they would dive three or four times, rising and turning and riding smooth on the salt-heavy air before they made their plunge, while the wind sang and the sea roared and their cries were drowned in the waves' tumble. But always, hour after hour in the strokes of the sun, they were there, circling high and ignorant of the people on the pier, who watched.

The pier itself reached out over the water like some great and withered old arm, straining to hold its weight steady against the cuff of ceaseless motion. And you were somehow grateful, as you found yourself there, suspended apart from time and element, for the sturdy reassurance of its sinews, underfoot. From up here, the world was a

kind of jewel-painted saucer, especially if you squinted up your eyes to make the whole scene blurry. The crowds of people on the beach were only dabs of color, the park was a green smear, the buildings melted into one great dusty stone wall, and the sea—the sea swirled a sparkling turquoise clear out to the horizon where it clashed with the blue of the sky. I wondered if the gulls had ever noticed all that.

Three Sisters were making their way out to the very end of the pier, their black robes flowing behind them as they beamed powdery-white smiles upon each stranger they passed. Old fishermen turned around to nod or smile back; little boys just stared, and sometimes you could not forget the solemn, wide-eyed look of them. So it is that I remember one of the little ones in particular, for he came every day, shirtless, barefooted, and as much a part of the scene as the gulls. He had come, I knew, from one of the back streets of the city where the washing hung in the alley and the scolds of mothers pierced the air, running crowded together in the confusion of a foreign tongue. He had come from one of these back streets that you never saw, but that you knew were there, for he had the dark skin and quiet, oddly-shaped eyes that told you, even before he spoke, that he was different, he was "Cubanna," as the American boys would say. When he was not fishing, he stood on the bottom rail—because he couldn't see over the top one unless he did—and scanned the clear water for the "bara-cuda" that swam, like smeared glints of silver, just below its surface. He had a friend, too, that he called "Tohm", and I remember wondering then why he should choose an American friend when he could speak no English, or why the one he chose should be so much older and so very different.

"Tohm" was short and dumpy with a plump red face and scraggly yellow crew-cut hair. The knit tee-shirts he wore were usually stained with bait-grease, and they hung shirt-tail out over jeans that were faded or dirty. But he had his own rod; it was a brand-new *Copenhagen* of a polished metallic silver that shown conspicuously against the eaten wood of the rails. I had never seen him make a catch, but apparently he was not discouraged, for now he squatted on his heels and baited the hook with a small discarded bream he had found on the pier, as a trap for some unlucky "bara-cuda", I supposed. He cast, and let the wind toy with his line for a while before reeling it in again. The little Cuban leaned on the top rail and watched silently.

The gulls had been watching, too. And then one of the smaller ones—perhaps it was a young one—wheeled and dived into the crisscross of white caps. Instantly, as if by signal, the sun flashed a myriad maze of diamond-white crystals on the water, blinding, where the black point of tine froze solid into a turquoise wave. The little one shaded his eyes from the glare, breathing suddenly faster and straining way over the wooden bar that pressed hard against his stomach, to see. His left foot slipped on the bottom rail.

The line pulled taut, black, and silhouetted against the sea.

Once, spasmodically, the slight frame of his body jerked, and then the air's stillness was shattered into a stream of foreign-sounding words, blurred, racing, and high-pitched. His hands reached out in waving gestures to take the rod, but Tom, scowling and red-faced, held it up and away from him and began to reel furiously. The gull screamed. All along the length of the pier, people turned, and there was the thud of bare feet on the splintered boards as an older dark-skinned boy came running; he jerked the rod away, roughly, muttering bitter-sounding words to himself. The gull was caught, deep, in the throat.

It cried with a horrible pinging sound as they pulled it up onto the pier and flapped its wings violently. The shadows of people moved over it where it rested on the rough-edged boards, closing in and blocking out the sun so that its eyes grew hunted and wild with pain. But it held very still, except for the rapid beating of its heart, warm through the wet white down that pulsed against

the little boy's palms. He held it as best he could and the older one—the one he called "Joe"—worked to free the barb, while they both talked in low, flecting voices. I wondered if they were brothers or only strangers with a nationality in common.

Tom had moved back into the circle of nonchalant watchers.

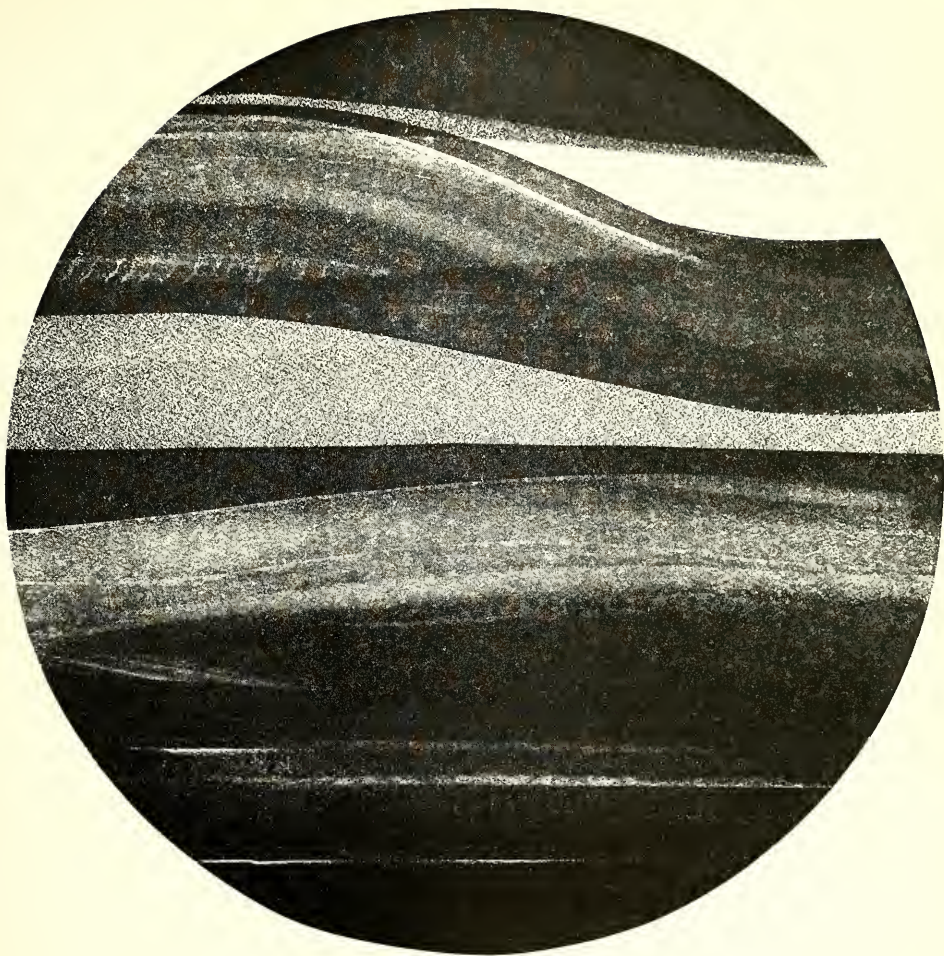
They freed the hook and the little Cuban stroked its soft feathery-white wings before he set it free. Still crying, it staggered a few steps, lifted itself in the air, and swooped in a kind of gathering momentum to the other side of the pier, just missing the top rail.

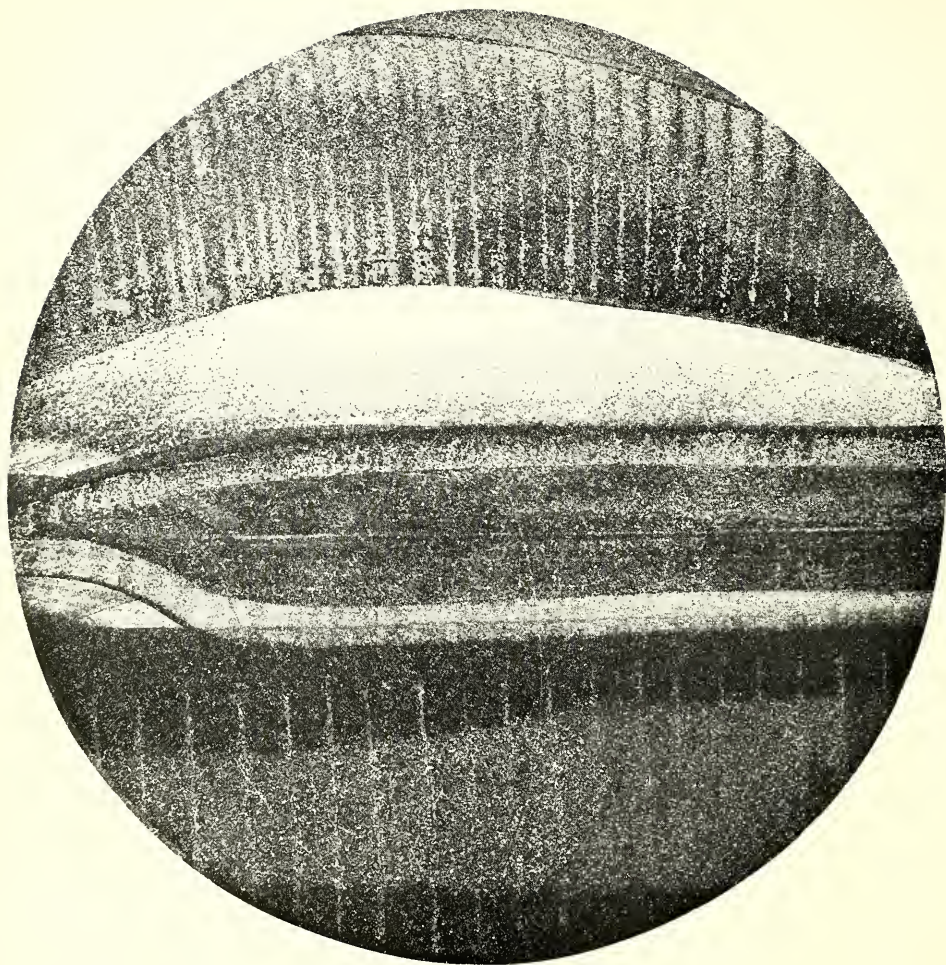
As quickly as they had come, the by-standers dispersed and only the little boy's eyes followed the gull as it lurched and zigzagged low over the pier. It flew like a crazy thing, batting its wings hard against the wind, instead of coasting with it. Its body twisted, strained, and tensed harshly rigid as it tried to balance; the salt-heavy air seemed to be bearing down heavy upon it. And then it rose once, high and dazzling-white against the background of the sun, before it fell in one steep, lunging crash.

He had run to the other side of the pier when it had begun to fall, and as he bent way over the rails to try to see, I watched his face. It was bleak, almost sad. He had dropped to his knees now, beside a pail of dead fish, where the boards of the pier were strewn with rusted, salt-crusted, barbed hooks that had been left to lie there, long ago. He was trying to see between the two bottom rails. Then his face stiffened, and his fingers tightened around the rail-posts, and he turned his eyes quickly away to look up and around.

The sky was still blue, the sun still warm. The Sisters were coming back now, and they were still smiling. "Tohm" had re-baited his hook and was chewing lazily on a piece of bubblegum as he watched the water. The dots on the beach had not lost their color, and the rails—the rails were still a chalk-grey color except for where the initials had been freshly carved into the wood, and in those places there were yellowish scratches.

He arose from his knees and carefully pushed his thumbs into his back pockets in the exact way that he had seen Tom do. In long, manly strides he crossed to the spot where "Tohm" was fishing and all the time whistled a loud, gay tune.





## CATHERINE LANDY

by

FLORENCE POSEY

High on the north side of a cold, winter mountain on a hundred barb-wired acres is a grey stone house that is home. It is a large house that resembles an immovable, ancient boulder that rose through centuries of weathering and violence. But I have been assured that it is man-made and dynamited from the quarry five miles below us. A wall juts out on one side and in the center of this is a large wide chimney. At the base it is at least eight feet wide, and at a height of seven feet it narrows to nearly half the base size. On the top, placed in opposition to the wind, which usually blows in a northwestern or southeastern direction — that is, up or down the face of the mountain and crossing the road — a piece of tin has been wired to the chimney.

The house has a loft, higher than a man only in the center, and gradually narrowing until it meets the edge of the roof. On the side is a cement porch which fits at right angles around the kitchen. A water box closes off the porch. From a spigot nearly head high, water splashes into an open cement box and from a narrow opening at

the end, streams into a second box covered by a wooden plank. In the spring, a large tree-like vine, growing behind the box and up to the roof, blooms with lilac flowers.

Coming up over the mountain and leveling as it nears the house, the gravel road cuts off the too small, bare, pebble filled yard. Large, naturally rectangular stones, placed as steps, lead up to the porch. From the road, the mountain slopes in several hundred yards of corn field down to the creek. The creek, Licklog, is filling with the soil that once made a farm. After a heavy rainstorm, when the earth is heavy and mucky, chunks fall from the bank into the water and wash down the creek into the Little Tennessee River. After such a rain the river turns a deep orange and feels heavy and slick from the deposits of silt from Georgia and North Carolina emptying into Fontana Dam.

Once I asked my grandmother the meaning of the name Licklog. She told me farmers used to have cowlicks on the tops of the mountains where they poured salt on great fallen stumps. But a neighboring boy said the creek was named for the liquor that was once sold at its head.

Except for our family, the creek is deserted. Several old houses remain but the families have gone. Years before, Grandfather gave my uncle Henry ten acres on the southern side of the opposite mountain. On it Henry built a block house. He had six children and the two oldest boys, Oscar and Carlyle, were hated by everyone on Licklog and nearby Panter Creeks. They had taken

loose tools, fish line, or hooks from nearly every house. Mocking, easily angered Oscar was the leader.

Trees sheltered their house from the road and on school days they left home with their sisters to catch the bus, but as soon as they were out of sight they went into the woods and loafed all day. When they went to school, the teachers said Carlyle was too dumb to learn and Oscar too mean.

Those around Oscar were unfortunate. Once while chopping wood, he cut off two of his younger brother's fingers. While fighting, he threw a rock at Carlyle and split a large cut on the top of his head. My grandmother washed the cut and filled it with salt and held a wet cloth to it, until my father drove him to the hospital.

In the spring, the teachers warn the students not to eat ramps. Anyone who eats them sits outside the classroom in the hall. Ramps send up short, tender, lily-shaped leaves in the early spring; their smell and taste is similar to garlic, only much stronger and more durable. Both the small, spherical, onion-shaped bulb and the leaves are eaten. They grow wild and after they are dug from the ground, they are cut into pieces and fried until they are tender and then salted and eaten. For anyone eating them, the smell is strong and rotting for two days.

Since they ate ramps, Oscar and Carlyle sat outside the school door and the other children laughed at them. Many of the families ate the plant but they usually remained at home until the smell disappeared.

But then the plant in which Henry worked, the Wood Turning Company—the only company in the county—went on a long strike. The plant closed and when it reopened, Henry had been black listed. Friends told him that he could find work in Oregon, so thirteen years ago he moved to the Pacific coast. He didn't write often but, then, none of the Landy family writes very much, and when he wrote, he always said they were doing "very well." for he would never have admitted defeat.

Preacher Ray, a preacher who formerly lived beside the river, had moved to Oregon; and on his return visits, he told us that Henry's family had a "bit of trouble" getting settled. Later we heard that Oscar and Carlyle had stolen a Shetland pony, and one of the younger boys had polio. Still later we heard that Oscar was in a reform school, and when I was seventeen we learned that Oscar had joined the navy.

Growing up, I was left alone in the middle of a large family. There were my grandmother, grandfather, parents, four sisters, and two brothers. Grandmother is eighty-three and a remarkable woman. Once tall and slender, now she is stooped and has silvery white hair. She has a long, aristocratic nose. I saw a picture of her taken not long after she married Grandpa, and she was pretty. Her father was a medical doctor and would have preferred his children to be intellectuals. But then Grandpa came from Tennessee with a bad reputation and a pretty face. And even today she admires a proud, handsome person. She is a smart old woman and likes to read the newspaper and Bible. About twenty years ago she had the last of her teeth pulled, and now her mouth and cheeks are sunken.

My family hasn't always lived here on the mountain.

Twenty-five years ago they lived at Forney and Bushnell, but then the TVA built Fontana Dam in that region. My grandparents bought this land, and it's all I've ever known. My father farms enough to feed us and logs if we need money.

Grandma has one main fault—she talks all the time. She talks about past, present, and future events; about the Bible, dating, college, the present fashions, financial affairs—anything which can be discussed. In the last years, particularly after Grandpa's death, she has traveled in the states surrounding North Carolina, visiting her different children; and then she and her son, my father, quarrel.

Grandma and father used to have theological arguments. But had anyone called them that, they would have laughed. My grandmother believes in a hell, heaven, and damnation, while my father used to be Deistic, saying God had set the world in motion, then left it alone. That was years ago; now, I don't know what he thinks.

Grandma remembers everything. Sometimes when she talks about the past, she sounds like the Bible—and Arphaxad begat Salah begat . . . She remembers the birth date of all her relatives and acquaintances and even people born before her. If she mentions some one, Harvey, that you haven't heard of before, she begins, "Harvey was born of Nat and Cora Sloam in 1902. He married Phil Harm's girl, Nellie, and had five children, Billie, Noma, Horace, Fanny, and little Willie, who died of smallpox."

Grandmother had eleven children, but two died when they were young. I'm named after one of them, Catherine. Grandma always said she was one of her prettiest children. Women used to wash by building fires under big pots that hung by wire over a bar supported by cross-stakes. Catherine was three years old when Grandma took her to the washplace and she turned the pot of boiling water over on herself.

My aunt Laurie was the oldest child. She ran away from home when she was sixteen and married Joe. Grandma cried and Grandpa hunted for them with his pistol and alerted the police in Forney and Bushnell. Laurie is tall and big-boned. She has been married twice now, but Joe is the only one that she considers her husband. Her second husband, Cotter, is now dead and she was accused of murdering him. That was about a year ago.

After she and Joe married, he worked hard and they were one of the wealthiest couples in the area that is now Gregory Dam. But then he lost all his money in the stock crash of 1929, and they moved to Blueledge, Georgia and bought a farm. About fifteen years ago, Joe had several strokes and was in the hospital for two years. The last months of his life Laurie sat by his bed and would not leave him. After his death she was in the hospital with a nervous breakdown. Then she came to the house. She always comes up here when she needs to recuperate, so I've always seen her at her worst. She has a compulsive need to talk and be with someone and tells the same things over and over again, everything Joe said and did, every time he had a stroke, every word he said and she said the last months of his life, and everyone who sent flowers or came to visit—and she had many friends. After his death she had to sell the farm to pay bills, and live with



her two married daughters. She loved that farm — it was her's and Joe's. She didn't like living with her daughters or depending on anyone. When she came to stay with us, she was nervous. Her head shook, and she had trouble feeding herself. When she was by herself, she would walk, up and down the road, down to the garden and back, in and out the rooms of the house talking to herself, pre-occupied in her past life. She would hunt my father or mother in the fields, where they stocked fodder, and nearly drive them insane with talking.

Then Cotter, who had a long white beard and was one of the richest men in Bluebridge, began visiting Laurie. She was old now too, with grey hair. Grandma, and all Laurie's sisters and brothers, children, and grandchildren were against the marriage, but three years after Joe's death she married him. Laurie's daughter wrote us that Cotter was a miser.

Grandmother did not like the marriage. But there was nothing she could do. For once her children grew up, they were out of her control.

Grandma never talks about it, and it was years before I even knew I had a dead uncle. But Henry killed his brother. When they came home, both had been drinking. Grandma never told me how it started, but Henry came in and found his brother beating Grandma. He had a pistol, so he shot him. Grandma still has a twisted left hand and big knot, as a large limb that has been cut from an apple tree, where the wrist bone was broken. She spent all the money she had, in Raleigh, hiring lawyers and going through lawsuits; Henry spent only a few years in jail.

The family has degenerated. Once the Landys were the social elite of Forney and Bushnell, but now most of my cousins marry before completing high school and work in factories and service stations. I must say I'm not much help. I'm a petty student at the university. The only remarkable things about me are my inability to communicate, extreme touchiness on almost any subject, and ability to mope for months.

Before my teen years, my only tasks were those I chose, feeding corn to our thirty bantam chickens, changing the water of our two gold fish, and feeding the cats. But then my parents decided I was old enough to work, or at least hoe corn. We dressed in big hats, patched shirts of my father, patched jeans, and any kind of shoe that fit. Mornings, I would mutter and stall until my mother threatened me with a belt. Then I'd stomp, half-crying, raging down to the corn field. Already having several rows plowed, father would stop the horse and run his sleeve over his forehead and in a calm voice would say, "It's nice out here this morning. The earth's light."

But soon, forgetting himself, he cursed and damned the wobbly-legged, son-of-a-bitch, deaf and dumb, fly swat of a brute. I remember his sudden loud, "Gees," "Haws," and "Who-o-oh!" in the early morning air. Dew still lay on the grass under the trees and each sprout of corn held a thimblefull of water. I had to chop down all the weeds around the corn and leave two bright green stalks standing. By dinner my hands were blistered.

Afternoons were worse. The earth was hot and dry and reflected the scorching heat waves. Toward quitting time my sister and I used the death stroke. With trem-

bling arms, we raised the hoe as high overhead as possible — then let it drop to the ground — a slow drag on one side of the corn, then on the other — forgetting weeds and briars. Then we leaned on our hoes and laughed and laughed and swore disaster on every hill of corn — getting far behind and not caring.

I went home Christmas of my junior year at the university. I was a confused person and had decided to leave the university next semester. The mountains were bare and ugly. The pines, holly, ivy, and laurel were all that remained green. With the green gone, the houses along the paved road, ugly brick with their bulldozed yards and grass, seemed like squatting toads. The gravel road was rough where frost had cracked the dirt in places and swollen it in others.

The night before Christmas, I listened to Handel's *Messiah*, while the rest of the family cursed me silently and then aloud. Dad swore he had rather hear his old hound baying at a polecat. The first hour they merely muttered, the next, my sister Janice said she couldn't read and was getting a headache, the last hour they ignored Handel and talked and laughed as if he weren't around.

At nearly 11:30, in the aria "I know that my Redeemer liveth," a car rolled past the house and gathered speed as it rounded the curve and blinked out of sight. None of us knew the owner from the taillights. When the car didn't return, we guessed it to be some hunter come to spend the night at the head of the creek and get in some early hunting.

The next morning my two young brothers waked me yelling. They both had a gun and darts, and one had a moving rabbit and the other, a moving tiger. Dad tried to shove all of us out of the way while he built a fire in the chimney. The clock showed 7:30, so I went back to bed. Neither of the two boys had been able to sleep well all night, and when Jason, the oldest, woke and saw the room barely light, he shook Benjamin and they ran to the tree.

Jason is eight. Eight seems young, but then I remember that when I was eight, I knew, though I denied, that there was no Santa. Benjamin is one year younger and cuddly, and knows only that good is right. One night he had his hand in the pan of popcorn we were all eating, and as he turned to leave, the pan slid off the couch and dumped the corn onto the floor.

"You fool — that's as good as he ever does," Dad yelled.

Benjamin's lip trembled, and he stood around a few minutes while Dad, snorting, got the broom and swept the corn into the fire. Then, trembling, Benjamin went into the kitchen.

"I didn't do it," he said so low he could hardly be heard. Janice had reached for a book and shoved the pan over.

After I went back to bed, I slept for hours until strange voices in the living room woke me.

Janice, hurried, came in to shake me and say that Oscar and Carlyle had come from Oregon, they were both terribly cute, they were going to move into their old home, they were going to stay with us until the house was ready.

and I'd better get up because they were bringing their clothes into the back room.

The house was built so that to enter the back room you passed through the hall into the room where I slept and then turned right. When I had gone to school, Janice had taken my room on the left, and when I returned, I slept in the middle room which was merely a pathway between the other two. The "back room" had once been used for storage but had been cleaned out and painted. Grandmother usually slept there.

I crawled out and put on a too-big sweatshirt and jeans, made up the bed and shook the dust from the rug.

I could hear the talk in the living room.

"Nobody recognized you at first."

"Thirteen years now—"

"Boys, you sure changed a lot."

"How's old Henry, I'll bet—"

"No, Granny ain't here. She's off visiting in Tennessee."

"It's changed up here. Everybody's moved away."

"Yeah, it's nearly deserted now."

I waited until the door slammed and everything was quiet.

The living room was warm, now, with a big fire. Janice stood at the window watching Dad, shagging out the road, two slender boys on each side of him.

"Where they going?" I asked.

"Dad's goin' to show them Lady."

Lady is the mare.

"What they doing up here — visit?"

"No, they're stayin'. Goin' to go to work."

"But there's no work up here. That don't make sense. I'll bet they were in trouble in Oregon."

Later that morning Dad and Carlyle drove off. Oscar stayed with us. He brought in his portable stereo and about 75 records.

Carl's records were hillbilly and country. He had Earl Scroggs, Stringbeans, Faron Young, Johnny Cash, Jim Reeves, and Marty Robbins. Oscar's ranged from Brahms, to Mexican bullfighting, to blues, waltzes, to go-go dance records. My youngest sister, Carolyn, has some by Tchaikovsky, the Beatles, folk music, themes from movies, and various popular records, especially Bob Dylan. Janice has two or three by Elvis.

Oscar was about five feet eight inches in height. He had curly blond hair, blue eyes, and his mouth was a little too full, and his nose a little too short. He was extremely slender with shoulders much broader than his narrow hips. He wore a squared shirt over his narrow pants and black dress boots. I later found that he was fashion conscious. His face was alive. He wasn't handsome, but everyone agreed he was nice looking. His main attraction was his personality and conversation.

While we listened to records, he shaved and changed clothes. He acted and must have felt completely unself-conscious. He was clever when he left and probably remembered Licklog. He belonged, even in the fashionable, tight pants. He had large hands with long fingers and nails. He had scars on his hands and face and long scars on his wrists, hands, and arms.

That evening when Carl and Dad came back, Dad had

been drinking. Apparently they had been to Harrisburg, a nearby town, since our town is dry. Dad piled wood in the fireplace, and the fire roared up the chimney. When he drinks, he always wants to build a huge fire.

Carlyle acted, dressed, and talked a combination of western and hillbilly. He was tall, thin, and slightly stooped. He wore gaudy cowboy shirts, tight Wrangler pants, and ornamented cowboy boots with high heels. He had great long hands. His eyes were blue and dreamy or meditative. His nose resembled Grandma's but his mouth was like Oscar's. Slightly stooped, he would stand, his hands behind his back, leaning against the mantel. He looked as if he might be hurt easily or else like a serious philosopher deep in thought. Even the clothes he wore did not look ridiculous on him. I always had an impulse to ask him what he was thinking.

That night for supper Mom took the last piece of bear meat from the freezer and cooked a huge meal. While Carolyn and I washed dishes, the others sat in the living room and talked about Henry and Oregon. Dad wanted to hear about all the scrapes and fights, and about work that Henry had done. Henry was now in his late fifties.

Oscar told how Henry always had to see the programs on TV that he chose. At night when he came home from work, he took his supper and beer to the living room and watched television until bed. At that time he expected the TV to be cut off and the house to be completely silent.

Oscar told how one night he had been drinking and after Henry went to bed, Os turned the TV back on. Henry didn't say anything for about thirty minutes, but lay in bed getting more and more angry. Then he came storming out of his bedroom, slammed his foot through the screen of the TV, and yanked Oscar out of his seat, "Sprout, when I turn that off, it stays off. No reeling, loose-brained youngen of mine, or no man elses is going to touch it." He had Oscar by the collar shaking him backward and forward.

Oscar reached up and grabbed Henry's hand. Henry turned him loose and jammed his fist into Oscar's jaw. When Oscar hit back, Henry roared and knocked Oscar across the room. Oscar hit his head against the wall and lay still. Henry picked him up and pitched him out the open window, "And don't you come back — or, by God, I'll take a gun and blast ye' head off!"

Oscar grinned when he finished talking, "Boy, the old man sure carries a punch. Nobody tells him what to do. I've tried it a few times, but, Jees, can he ever cut you down—st-r-o-ng."

"That sounds just like old Henry," Dad said.

"That's him all right," Carlyle said. "We hadn't been in Oregon long when he told the whole welfare and police force where to go."

Carlyle talked in a slow twang. "When we first got out there we didn't have much to eat and barely a shack to live in. We's as just about to starve to death. The Welfare heard about us and they was going to take us all and put us in foster homes. Dad'd been drinking and cutting up a bit. When he heard th' Welfare was going to take us, he kept us all from school. They came to the house a time or two trying to get him to sign some papers — he

just cussed 'em. Then they decided to take us anyway. Dad saw the whole shubang of 'em coming. He got his old shotgun and sat in a chair in the door, until they come up to the porch. Then he yelled at 'em, slow and deliberate, "The first son-of-a-bitch that puts his foot over this door-sill gets his damn-ed head blown off!"

Oscar grinned and shook his head, "Not a one of them came near either."

Dad laughed and laughed and hit his knee. "What kind of work's he doin'?"

"For a time he worked in construction. But the boss razzed him a bit and he told him to go to hell. He tried picking cherries and apples but that didn't suit him. He worked in filling stations but he's an independent cuss and can't take orders. He mostly drank and did nothing, but he finally earned enough money to buy a filling station and he built a garage. He makes out fine as his own boss but no other man is going to tell him how to behave."

Dad said, "He was always like that. You reckon he'll ever come back here. We keep expectin' him all the time."

Carlyle said, "He'd like to. He keeps talking 'bout it. But, Mom, she won't come back. She likes the city, 'en she has a good house now 'en a lot of furniture. She likes it. If she has anything to say, they won't be back. But if the ol' man sets his mind, he'll pack up 'en come back here. But he's," he shrugged, "he's fairly well satisfied out there."

"He ever go huntin' any more?" Dad asked.

"Oh, yeah," Carl said, "Him 'en a whole gang'll get together for a deer hunt 'en sometimes he'll pot one. But he ain't hunted much the last few years."

Oscar added, "But he still takes out his gun and goes off in the woods behind the house. He kills a squirrel or two sometimes. Other times he takes his gun and a bottle of whiskey and goes into the woods just to be alone. Toward night, Mom sends me to hunt him and I usually find him asleep somewhere on the ground." He grinned, "You have to be careful how you wake him."

"Is there much drinkin' out there?" Dad asked.

"Oh, Lord," Carl said, "More than I ever seen anywhere else."

"I have enough company," Oscar said. "Drunks all in the park. Bums walking around begging, but the winos are worst. They fall lower than any other human — once they're hooked, they're gone. In Portland there are feeding stations for them. Every morning they form long lines — waiting for a bowl of soup." He laughed, "Handy if you're broke — winos get a job for a few days until they have enough money to buy wine and then they're back on the bottle again."

"Me, I don't drink," Carl said. "I tried it just one time. And that was th' only time." He waved his hand toward Os, "He dragged me to a party he's going to. I thought I'd drink just like everybody else. When we got there everybody 'as doing the frug or jerk or som' thing like that 'en I felt all out of place. That stuff ain't for me. After I'd had one drink, everything seemed better. So I had another. Everything started going around, my stomach started jerking. I hunted a door and got out of there. I was so sick I thought I 'as dead. I didn't know what I 'as doing."

Os said, "He sure didn't. I had to drag him out from under a car. He crawled under there and pawed the dirt and was sick."

When I'm home I usually sleep until I wake and since the rooms are cold and reasonably quiet that's anywhere from ten o'clock to noon. When I waked I could hear "Blue Christmas" by Elvis and knew Janice was listening to records. I got up and put on the same pants and sweatshirt.

Dad and Carlyle were missing and I asked where they were.

Janice told me, "There's not much wood left. That's where Dad and Carlyle went." She had a large wall mirror on her knees and propped against the small table. She spread make-up over her face. "Dad says he's going to keep a fire in the chimney all Christmas. He'll have to keep a lot of wood. But he likes to see the flames."

Janice and I always used to fight tremendous battles; but, now, we can talk. We're not at all alike — she's the opposite of everything I believe and feel. She is proud and beautiful with long, black hair, blue eyes, long face, full lips and Grandma's nose — large bones but our mother's round body. But my tormented teen sister is self-centered. Ideas will never trouble her deeply. What she thinks at the time is right — she doesn't even hear the opposite side of an argument.

I grew up surrounded by sisters who did not feel, think, or view the world as I. My youngest sister, Carolyn, resembles me somewhat, except that she's easy to live with and doesn't become excited about anything. Over Christmas we played checkers and she beat me half the time. Her mind is quicker than mine. While I take ten minutes thinking over a move and planning ahead, she only needs five.

Then Dad and Carlyle came down the road. Dad had a long trimmed tree on his left shoulder and carried the axe in his right. At the chop block in the back yard he threw the wood off his shoulder and it rolled over and lay still. Carlyle came behind him with two or three of the limbs. Dad cut the wood into back logs and then split some for firesticks. Carlyle carried it in and Oscar went out to help.

That night Carlyle borrowed some paper to write his wife. I saw the letter when he finished; he had written four lines. He probably missed his family for he showed us a picture of his wife and his two children. The oldest, a girl, had been born with a deformed leg and still couldn't walk well. The youngest was a pretty boy. His wife was a Catholic.

"Your kids will be raised Catholics, then." I said.

"No! I won't have any kid of mine a Catholic."

"But they have to be."

"No, they don't have to be. My wife wanted to get water sprinkled on 'em but I ain't going to have it. All that mumble jumble and a priest praying before statues. They ain't no sense in it. I told her if they wanted to go to church, they could go to a Methodist just like I used to."

"What did your wife say?"

"Oh, she whined and cried about a bit but I told her just to shut up."

Os mocked him, "Listen to him. To hear him talk you'd think he bossed the family. Why, his wife tells him everything to do." He looked at Carl and nodded his head, "And he does it."

Carl sat shaking his bent head, his arms on his knees, and cracked his large knuckles. "My kids ain't going to be Catholic. A priest came t'see me one day. Tried t'talk me into letting 'em be baptised. I told him to get out of my house and not come back. And that's what I told my wife. I told her she could get out and leave or she could shut up. I kept the kids — She's gone about three days before she came back."

"You were glad to see her," Os said.

"Yeah, I 'as glad." Carl said. "She ain't mentioned it again. She may try it now that I'm gone."

I told him, "But, Carlyle, Catholics believe that. She probably thinks your kids will go to hell if they aren't baptised."

"They ain't nothing in it."

"But she thinks there is. Just think how she feels."

Grimacing, Oscar stopped me. "He won't listen to you. You can't tell him anything. I can't even argue with him. He thinks he was born with the correct answers and he hasn't changed them since."

I said, "Carl, you change as you get older."

He stood up and leaned against the fireboard, and looked at me with his wise blue eyes. And this time there was emotion in his voice, "Everybody's always trying to change ye'. Well, I know what I am 'en I want 'em to leave me alone." He sat back down in his chair. "That's what happened in school, even grammar school," his voice was slightly bitter now, "They'as all there t'try t' make ye' over. Trying t'make ye' think like them."

"Ah, listen to him," Oscar said.

Carl's slow deliberate voice said without accusation, "I don't get drunk all the time." Carl looked at us, "He was drunk all th' way out here and I drove. He sat over there and groaned and moaned and drank beer and talked to people and saw things that wadn't there. He wouldn't even sober up t'keep me company."

Oscar laughed, "Now, I was fairly sober when we had the flat tire."

Carlyle told us, "We had a flat tire in the middle of a small town in Arkansas. A jobber was about to haul us in."

"We had a time talking him out of it," Os said.

Carlyle looked at him, "Huh, you sat on the curb and blubbered." Carl looked at us, "He'd run out of beer a while back. We sat there all night in the middle of the road until I borrowed a jack and patching and fixed it."

Oscar told him, "I thought you'd never get that thing on again."

"And you sat and bossed. I can't stand somebody that won't help. He had the tremors and was telling me how to do it."

"My wife tried it once. We'as coming back from a movie. It'as after midnight. Some'em happened to the engine. I got out and tried t'work on it. She sat in the car and yapped and screamed at me. I couldn't help it. I told her if she could fix it, to get out and do it. I'm going home. I walked home. The next morning I came back. She's

sitting in there quiet as a mouse and I fixed it and drove home and she didn't say anything."

Oscar said, "Don't believe what he says. She crooks her little finger and he jumps. She could beat him and he wouldn't move."

Carlyle shook his head, "No, I hit her one time and that was all — I'll never do it again. We were standing on the porch quarreling about something. I got mad and drew back my fist and hit her and knocked her off the high porch. I didn't mean to do it. I was mad. It ain't going to happen again."

The parents were in bed, and we had moved our chairs near the fire which was fast going out. We had already pulled down the back-stick. We had forgotten the fire, and as we got colder we moved closer. I got two sticks of Dad's kindling and stuck it in and put another stick of wood on, then tore a piece of paper from the newspaper and blew on it until it caught and caught the kindling.

"Bout as cold as the night we got here," Carl said. "When we went up, there was still a light on here."

"Why didn't you stop?" Janice asked.

"Os was so drunk he didn't know where he was. So we went on over to the house. Damn was it cold over there. I found the beds and old mattresses and a few blankets and wrapped up in them. A cold drizzle wet us when we walked over and we got our feet wet in the creek. I sat over there and shivered all night."

"I didn't feel a thing," Oscar said.

"You couldn't," Carl said, "He sat in the middle of the floor. Wouldn't take a blanket or anything and rocked back and forth. Drunk as a loon."

"I was nice and warm."

Our fire had gone out again. Carlyle sat beside it and I pointed to the shovel and told him to stir the fire.

He took the shovel, clumsy, for he was not used to an open fire. He barely touched the wood as if he feared the crossed sticks might fall.

"Why aren't you married?" I asked Oscar.

"Couple of times — I nearly was. But — I guess, I'm not ready to marry yet."

"A woman wouldn't like you to drink so much," I told him.

"If I were married, I wouldn't drink."

"Marriage doesn't suddenly change you. That's silly."

"No." His face was serious. "No. I'd change. For her."

"But people aren't like that, they don't just suddenly change their whole nature."

"I've quit before — for months."

"You're not quit now."

"Well, no, why should I?" He was smoking, tipping the ashes into the fireplace. "But marriage is different. When I get married, I want it to last and I'll do my part. I'll get a job and work regularly." His eager face and bright eyes looked at me and he laughed, "I nearly had a shot-gun wedding. A girl in Portland was pregnant and said I was the father. I guess I was. But Mom said I wasn't going to marry her — that she was a common slut. Her parents went to court. But Mom took me to the navy recruiting station and I was shipped out of Portland."

"What did you do in the navy?"

"Got drunk and fought. Spent most of the time in the clink. Got my nose busted." He rubbed his nose, "It's

been broke three times now. I broke my left arm — had syphilis once. A lot that you hear about navy men is true."

"Maybe," I said, "it was the group you were in."

He gave me a quick look, "Perhaps — I started smoking marijuana."

"Why?"

"Liked the way it made me feel."

"How did you feel?"

"Happy. Nothing can touch you, nothing. You're out. Way out."

He was gesturing and slightly nervous and I was afraid to ask anything else. Though he didn't seem to mind anything said to or about him.

"We heard you fell from the crow's-nest or something and cracked your skull."

"I jumped. I was drunk and thought I could fly." He laughed, "They picked me off the deck with my brains hanging out and a few bones broke here and there." He shrugged and said, "They put me in the hospital and put a steel plate over my brain, sewed me back up and decided I'd live."

"What happened then?"

"The navy discharged me. I wandered around Oregon."

The fire had gone completely out. I took the shovel and busted the last of the backstick. The coals sent up a thin smoke. After I blew on them, a weak flame sprang up.

"If we don't go to bed soon," I said, "We'll all freeze."

It was midnight and Benjamin had been in bed since nine, but Jason was still up. We made him warm his feet and go to bed. Carl, Oscar, my two sisters and I weren't ready for bed.

I wondered if Os told his life like this to everyone or just to us.

"We heard you were in the reform school once." I told him.

My sisters looked as if they would love to shake me.

Oscar grinned, "Twice. The first time Carl and I stold a Shetland pony."

"It wadn't my idea," Carl said.

"No, but I made him help. An old man outside town had a big farm with several horses and the pony. Carl and I would go out there and pet him. He was the prettiest animal I'd ever seen — a yellow color. One night I took a rope and led him back home and tied him in the woods behind the house. Fairly soon they found him — Dad was angry with me for stealing and let them send me off.

"The second time, I had just got back home when they caught me swiping a fly rod out of a sporting goods store and back I went. After this, I was old enough to go to jail. Part of the time Dad went bail for me; the rest he just let me stay."

"He should have," I told him.

He grinned and scooped up some bright coals on the shovel and used them to light his cigarette. Then said, "Yeah."

"One time he was on trial for attempting to shoot a game warden. Tell 'em about that Os." Carl said.

"Deer season was open. Carl and I and three or four

other boys went hunting on a game preservation. We had all been drinking. "We got a big doc and were in the jeep pulling out when this game warden pulled up and stopped us."

Carl said, "They wouldn't 'ave done much to us except Os got his gun and got outside the car and tried to shoot the warden. He was crazy drunk. Crazy. The rest of us ran down the hill."

"And I'd have shot him except he shined a light in my eyes and I couldn't see."

"What happened?"

"They took me in. Dad's lawyer convinced the jury that I was merely trying to scare the warden when I shot. But if I'd got the bastard, I'd have killed him. He beat me up when he got hold of me."

The fire had now gone out, so everyone else went to bed. I wasn't sleepy so I spread a newspaper on the hearth and sat down. I thought of the university and how I should be studying and then I didn't think of it. For some reason Oscar found me interesting. When I talked and particularly when I was angry I felt him look at me. Probably it was because I was a student at the university; or perhaps someone had told him, as I had once overheard one of my uncles say, that I was the only Landy in Dad's family. Afterwards I thought about what he had said and saw that it was true.

The next morning when I woke, Janice and Carolyn were the only ones at home. The sun shone, and for Christmas, the weather was warm.

"Where is everyone?" I asked.

"Outside messin' round," Janice said.

"Oscar won't stay here," I said. "It's much too quiet for him. I'm surprised that he's still here after two days. I like him, don't you?"

"Well, he's crazy but I like him. But Carl's sweet. I like him much better."

"Yes, Carl's nice."

Then Janice told me, "I wish you wouldn't ask so many questions. Some things don't concern you. You'll make him mad yet."

"No, I won't. He don't seem to mind telling anything. Now I'd mind. If somebody asked me questions like that, I'd probably knock hell out of them."

"Have you noticed, they don't curse very much. You'd think they would."

"That's right."

"Catherine, I wish you'd change clothes. You're the most ragged creature."

"I look all right and I'm warm."

Oscar came into the room and told me good morning. Then he put on some records and asked me what I would like to hear and I told him I liked what he was playing. He went outside to the car and brought back a heavy brown sweater with thick pile.

He said, "This is a girl's sweater. I don't know whose it is or how it happened to be in the car. Would one of you like it?" He hung the sweater on the back of a chair. The sweater was nice but I was embarrassed to take it and didn't say anything. Janice, who had been in the kitchen heard him and came in. "Oh! I like it." She admired herself in the mirror, then took the sweater to her room.

After dinner, my parents, Oscar and Carlyle, and the two boys took the two brooms and went over to Henry's house. Before long Mom, Dad, and the two boys came back. Dad said Oscar was pitching all the mattresses and old blankets into the yard. "He'd better leave them there. Those things are costly. He just thinks he's going to buy all new furniture. Carlyle told us they spent all their money comin' out here. That Os don't do anything but lay drunk anyway. He ain't goin' to work. He don't need to be up here."

When they came back, Mom handed Oscar a big box and told him to pick up all the beer cans he had thrown around the house and take them down the road and throw them away.

Oscar laughed and took the box. Jason and Benjamin helped him pick up the cans.

That evening I went out to the old wrecked blue car that Dad had bought for parts. Mom and Dad had taken the seats out and used the floor for drying walnuts. I grabbed some walnuts and took them back to the house, to crack. Mom got the hammer, and I sat down before the fire and cracked nuts on the cement hearth.

Oscar came in and seemed surprised to find me sitting cross-legged and red-faced from the heat. I offered him a walnut and half the hearth.

"No, thank you," he said.

That evening while Mom cooked supper, Carolyn and I discussed a story we had both read. She didn't understand the symbolism. I explained to her that the protagonist was off mentally and the sleek black tiger that followed him around was a sex symbol. Each time he was around the girl, she changed into the tiger. The man was afraid of sex and these hallucinations were his means of coping, for he could run from a tiger without embarrassment.

Oscar was sitting in the room, his feet stretched out to the fire listening intently without looking at us.

Later he was amused when he found me staring, generally dissatisfied, out the kitchen window.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

I smiled at him, "Nothing."

That night after supper, I came in after washing my hands in the water box on the porch. Instead of drying them, I shook them in my sisters' faces. We seldom play this way, but they tried to drag me outside and duck me, but I clung to the door and fought. Oscar came in to see what was going on and stood in the room laughing at us. Once they got me outside I broke loose and ran.

That night Dad read to Benjamin and Jason a book called *Animals of the Night*, which contained much onomatopoeia. Birds twittered, rats squealed, and owls hooted. Carolyn was reading *Anna Karenina* and enjoying it, and Janice was finally reading *Gone with the Wind*. Oscar was reading a paperback, *The Fountainhead*, and occasionally laughed aloud. Mom worked in the kitchen and Carl listened to Dad read. I worked on a paper.

Then the parents and kids went to bed. Oscar went into his room and I wondered if he were already going to sleep. But he came back with a notebook and pencil and sat down and wrote. He finished and read over what he had down.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

He gave me a quick grin, "Writing a poem."

"I didn't know you wrote. I write sometimes myself. What do you write?"

"Poetry."

I watched him as he shut his notebook and lay it on the floor.

"Huh — could I, huh, read some of them? Do you mind?"

"No, no," he quickly opened the notebook and took out the lined paper and some unlined he had folded in the back.

Janice and Carolyn took some sheets. Carlyle sat looking into the fire.

For a while the style and content confused me. He wrote in free verse, intensely personal, highly abstract and with little imagery. The poems were intellectual, containing words I didn't know, and I had difficulty understanding them. They contained nothing conventional, except the meaning. They were the questions Oscar asked and knew no answer. He asked the meaning of the universe, of man, he questioned of God. He wrote of needing a drink and a fix and of loneliness and despair and suicide, and he wrote of making love and giving and taking and the beauty and feel of a woman's body.

But his work did not depress. Emotion came through the abstract. But I could not tell if he had depth. But perhaps he had to have depth to write this way. Yet, I knew, he lacked control.

I wondered how it would be to have him make love.

Oscar sat deceptively calm — looking into the fire. Yet the hand holding his cigarette trembled.

I wondered just what to say for I wanted to talk about the work. So I started with the common, "Have you ever tried to publish a work?"

He knocked his ash into the fire, "No."

"Why do you write this way? It's very personal."

"The way I think and feel."

He looked at me and I felt he was disappointed.

"Have you ever studied poetry?"

"No."

I had a poem I liked in my hand and read aloud a few lines and saw his eyes light. He liked the way I read.

"I like that." I said, "I like the movement."

I looked through his work for another I particularly liked and started reading but faltered over his handwriting. He took it from me and read a few lines. Then he stopped and handed it back to me, and I finished reading.

"That's very good," I told him.

He looked at me briefly, his whole body alive.

"You finished high school didn't you?"

"Yes, and took some courses in a college in Portland."

"What kind of courses?"

"A sociology and psychology."

"What did you do after that?"

"I took a degree from an electrical school." He sat silent a moment, "I've done some reading in the library. Mostly psychology."

I shook the paper in my hand, "Some of your works are difficult to understand."

He laughed, "Some of them were written before I

went to the bug house and some after. You can probably tell the difference. The psychiatrists read them and couldn't make anything of them."

"How did they get hold of your writing?"

"Mom gave them my notebook."

"Didn't that make you angry—her giving them your private papers?"

"No, I didn't mind. They couldn't reach my conclusion. I know I'm not crazy now."

"But why did they put you in?"

"For schizophrenia and manic-depressive reactions."

"What did you do? How did you act?"

He gave a short laugh.

I looked at Carlyle and his face was white, his eyes wide, and I felt he didn't want me to ask anything else.

Oscar said, "I would sit on the floor, arms around my knees, rocking back and forth."

"What did you think and feel?"

"Nothing."

"But you had to feel something."

"No, I didn't hear or think anything."

"And they sent you to a psychiatrist."

"That was the first time." He held out his arms and showed the long scarred marks on both his wrists. "I tried to kill myself the second time." His voice was light. He might have been talking of buying a shirt.

"And they sent you back."

"The first time they just talked. The last time they kept me in a room by myself and gave me depressants and shock treatments and talked."

"What did you do while you were there?"

"Nothing—Well, one time I piled everything in the room in front of the door and wouldn't let anyone in." He laughed, "I thought they were coming to kill me."

"What are shock treatments like?"

"They put wires on your head and give you electric shocks."

"Doesn't it hurt?"

"It knocks you out—doesn't feel too good." He stiffened then jerked as if he held a pneumatic drill. "Like that."

"What does it do to you mentally?"

"It makes you forget the way you feel. You feel better."

"How better."

He frowned, "Just better."

"How did you feel when you went in?"

He laughed, "Well, I'd just slashed my wrists."

I was afraid to go farther. "How did you feel when you came out?"

"Like everybody else."

"What did they tell you? You said they talked."

"They learned my whole life." He grinned, "Some of it was pretty bad."

"What did they tell you."

"They just talked—for one thing—well, they said I was a realist."

I was surprised, "You're a realist—they told you you were a realist? How do you define a realist as, say, versus an idealist?"

"A realist sees the world as it is, without dreams. He

knows what he wants and what he can have—rather, self-centered. An idealist dreams and has absolute values, and's not practical."

Carlyle's face asked me to stop and my sisters were tense.

"That's why you drink then—because you're a realist."

Carlyle stood up and stirred the fire with the shovel. "It's getting cold in here," he said. He remained standing, his hands behind his back. "These artists could talk all night."

We all laughed and drew closer to the fire.

Oscar looked at me and waited.

I asked him, "What were some of the things you did before you had treatment?"

"Drank and took narcotics when I could get them."

He showed me the V shaped scars on the inside of his arms. "That's the hypodermic needle."

"How do you take narcotics?"

"You smoke marijuana but that doesn't give you much of a lift. Then there are tablets of cocaine and morphine but it takes longer to go into effect and part of it is lost in your stomach. The best way is to inject into your bloodstream. You can melt a tablet—put it over any kind of light—even a candle, and then 'pow' with the old needle and you're all set." He motioned as if he inserted a needle.

"How do you feel?"

"Oh, you're all right then. Happy, floating. Pleasant dreams."

"What kind of dreams?"

"I don't know—One time, I was king of a harem. I sat on a pink camel floating over the desert with beautiful women in long flowing dresses around me."

"After you wake up—you remember what happened?"

"Yes, you remember."

"What other things do you remember?"

"I was floating over the desert," he made waves with his hands, "and the women brought me things to eat."

I decided he didn't want to answer me and knew he must have a reason. I got up and put another stick of wood on the fire.

Oscar went to his room and came back with cokes for us all and two 39¢ bags of potato chips. Os and Carlyle had brought a case of cokes and beer and some canned goods with them and Mom told Carlyle just to keep them—they would probably need them later.

We sat a while crunching potato chips. Then I asked "What else did you do before they sent you to the psychiatrist?"

"I used to have this buddy George, and he and I would buy some liquor and go down to the wharf and get huge refrigerator boxes and carry them to the park. We'd pick up old newspapers and shred them on the floor. Then we'd loll in our boxes and talk and sing and get drunk. When we ran out of whiskey we'd get in line with the wimos and go work for some money to buy more whiskey. Sometimes the cops found our boxes and carted them away and we'd have to get new ones. Sometimes they caught us and stuck us in the clink.

"I remember when the rain fell. The boxes sogged and

the paper felt goeey and I'd lay there and drink and the water curled around me." He grinned and spread his arms in a careless gesture. "Jees, when you're out you don't care."

He laughed, "Once I took this old squaw to a cabin in the woods. Indians live down by the wharf. Until they get about 21, they're pretty. I've seen some damn pretty ones. But they get gre-e-sy and nasty. Chr-ist do they ever get greasy."

"This old squaw I had must have been forty."

"I locked us in the old cabin. After a couple of days I had this feeling she was trying to kill me. I had a rifle and I was going to kill her before she got me. She got behind a huge old stove in the room. I lay on the other side of the room and took pot shots at the stove. I saw the stove later and it had notches all in it where I'd shot." He paused, "The old man got me out of that."

"Once I took off my clothes and ran naked and screaming down Main street."

"Good Lord."

"After I got out of the bug-house I went to the library and read every book and pamphlet they had on psychology and psychiatry."

He tore a sheet of notepaper out and drew a structure. "This is from the Rorschach. What do you think this is?"

Carlyle and Janice said, "A flower."

"Yes," Carolyn agreed.

"What do you think, Catherine?"

Embarrassed, I laughed and shrank back into my chair, "Oh, we won't do me. You have three people, that's enough."

He drew two or three more indistinct pictures. Then he handed Janice a piece of paper and told her to draw a man and woman. After she had drawn them he interpreted.

"Your man is taller than the woman, so you want the man to control. Nose and buttons are prominent sex symbols. You have carefully drawn clothes, so external appearance is important. Your hands and feet are complete and you admire strength—"

Janice said, "I don't believe that."

He crumbled the paper and threw it into the fire, "I'm no psychiatrist. They have an M. D. degree and special training. That's just something of what I learned. I wanted to know what they had learned about me."

I asked him what would happen to someone living in an environment in which they could not get out and did not want out, but who could not and did not believe or act as the others. They could not change, nor would the environment change.

He sighed, "The person has problems — depends on how responsive he is to the surroundings. Since he can't change, the others will smother him and he'll probably be neurotic or psychotic."

We sat around the fire — quiet.

He remarked that he hated "niggers" and asked me what I thought of integration and I told him I had slept in the same room with a Negro and three other white girls all summer. We had worked together and the Negro had been one of my best friends. After work we played whist and took walks together.

"I can't understand how you're so smug," I told him. I had surprised him. "But they're slovenly, smelly creatures."

"Not the ones I've known."

"The ones I know work on the wharf and they're terrible. They smell for yards."

"That's because they live there. If they were in a different environment they would be different—I don't want to talk about it—I always get mad."

I grabbed the shovel and jabbed the fire, "Conceited, self-centered people. Think they can do anything and always have somebody lower to stomp. Prejudiced-cogitistical."

He stared at me, "Well, give me time."

"You've had 23 years." But then I sat disgusted with myself for name-calling.

"What do you think about religion?"

"I think we'd all have to say we didn't know."

He was merely making conversation now.

Then the blackened ashes of the sheet of paper rose and swirled above the glowing coals and were drawn up the dark chimney. I laughed aloud and knew he was smiling at me.

That night we went to bed at three o'clock.

Oscar must have decided nothing happened in the morning. I had been up and about before he got up.

I knew something was amiss for he followed me from living room to kitchen and talked. Then I learned that he was going into town to buy a part for the car. Surely he didn't expect dirty me to go along. And yet I would like to go. He and I could have fun just riding to town. But I had fallen into my usual stay-at-home indolence and I feared to invite myself. Perhaps he wanted to go into town for whiskey. Yet I *knew* he wanted me to go and I reacted as I always react when anyone appeals to my intuition—I did the opposite—went into the kitchen and peeled potatoes for mother.

After dinner Os went into his room and in ten minutes came out in a medium olive coat, slim pants and white shirt with slim tie. His clothes were perfect and with his blond hair, he was handsome.

He and Carl drove off and I knew they would be gone far into the night.

He was back, laughing and talking, in three hours.

That evening Dad popped a big pan of corn and we sat around eating. We have a part Persian cat, who loves popcorn and she ran to different people begging. I dropped a grain on the opposite side of my chair. Fluffy couldn't see it. I bent, picked it up, and ate it. I felt Oscar's startled eyes on me and knew he disapproved. That angered me.

That night after supper, Oscar came into the living room rubbing his flat abdomen, "If I don't stop eating so much I'll have a belly."

Carlyle wanted a job and Dad told him Calvin Breedlove would probably hire him. Calvin had recently moved to a new logging region and probably needed men. Dad told them how to reach his house and they drove off. We sat in the quieted house, reading.



They were back soon, Carl had a job the next day, Friday, and Os would begin work on Monday. Dad warned Carl not to stay up all night jabbering. He had to get up at 4:00 and wouldn't get back to the house until 5 or 6 in the afternoon. Carl wondered how he would wake. I had brought my alarm clock home and told him I would set that. I asked Mom if she wasn't going to cook breakfast for him and fix a lunch. I got a short, "yes."

Carl was satisfied and went to bed happy.

My aunt Laurie's voice woke me the next morning. She had come to stay with us until her lawyer, Spence, had changed Cotter's money into her name.

She was older than I remembered: grayer, more wrinkled, more nervous, and she talked more.

She had reached town last night by bus and took a taxi to Ramon Clemon's and this morning Ramon brought her to our house. Ramon lived in town and she had known him when she lived on Forney Creek.

She had come from Tennessee where she had seen Grandma. She had only a little money left. But next Monday, when she wanted to be back home, she expected a letter from Spence telling her her check was ready.

From that time, I heard and reheard everything leading up to Cotter's death, the trial, and everything that had happened since. For my sisters and brothers, public school had opened again; Carlyle worked; Mom and Dad stayed outside — if they had nothing to do, they invented things. Oscar went hunting. I was left and she followed me from room to room, satisfied as long as she had someone to whom she could speak.

I am not ridiculing my aunt. She is extremely interesting, but hours of listening can be tedious.

After Laurie married Cotter, he took her to his home. Laurie swore it was the dirtiest place she had ever seen. For weeks she cleaned. The upstairs belonged to Lloyd, Cotter's son. Laurie went upstairs to clean but when she opened the door to the loft the putrid and stifling smell drove her downstairs.

That evening she chided Lloyd about his rooms. Lloyd sat with his head on his hands. Then angry, he raised his head and spoke gruffly, "You stay down from there. That don't belong to you. I want it like it is."

She told me that sometimes after she went to bed, Lloyd slipped women up the backstairs. Drunk, giggling women — the ugliest things she'd ever seen. She told Cotter to make him stop but Cotter told her to mind her own business.

"Catherine," she told me, "They was the worse people I'as ever seen. Lloyd made whiskey and sold it." She leaned forward, jerking, "I'as ashamed to own 'em, when I went to town. No," she laughed, "I wouldn't own 'em."

She sat back in her seat. "The whole time I'as there, not a one of 'em went to church."

She had a habit of wiping her mouth with her handkerchief.

"Why, Catherine, Lloyd'd bring in two or three big drunkards and they'd sit in the living room and tell the

nastiest things, I'd ever heard, and me sitting there. All about what they'd done to women. I guess every word they said was true. I tried to sit as far from the stove as I could and not freeze and tried to shut my ears but I still heard 'em.

"Cotter had a red-haired girl. Sometimes she'd come to the house. She'd cuss and drink worse than any man. He had two boys — mean as devils.

"Cotter was better than all of 'em. He was a stingy ol' man. Now he didn't believe in wasting nothin'. He bought me one coat and dress while we's married. But they were good. When he got somethin' it lasted. He was good to me. He was childish right before he died and I petted him. He was a good ol' man; he couldn't help what his children did.

"He made a will right after we married. He left me his money, and the house to both me and Lloyd as long as I lived, and the land to Lloyd.

"Lloyd's dumb and crazy but not as crazy as they're trying to make him seem."

She looked proudly at me, "I know what they're up to. They sent me papers before I left Bluebridge — to sign so they could send him off." She laughed and wiped her mouth, "I didn't sign 'em. No, Buddy, I didn't.

"Catherine, they make him tell those lies. I know Lloyd. I know he likes me as much as he can. That sister and those brothers of his put him up to it. They had him memorize everythin' he said. They made him say I shot Cotter.

"Then when he lost they tried to have him sent off to the insane asylum." She smiled at me. When she smiled her upper teeth bit slightly into her lower lip. The teeth were false. She was a nice-looking old woman despite the peculiarities.

"See, Catherine, I knew what they was up to. If they'd sent him off, they could have contested the will and got his part and maybe mine." She smiled and wiped her mouth.

"They won't get him while I'm around. I'll see to that. He ain't no more crazy than the rest of 'em."

"Why the first day of court, Lloyd stopped me on the steps of the courthouse and asked me how I was. Then that Fuller, his brother, came up and snatched him away and hissed at him not to be talking to me.

"No, Lloyd, wouldn't hurt me."

Mom wasn't back at 11:30 so I started dinner. Laurie talked while she thawed the beef and put on coffee.

"I buried Cotter in style. The rest of the family would have stuck him in a box and forgot him — I know. I bought him a new suit of clothes, the prettiest casket they had, a tombstone and had a nice verse inscribed on it. He'd been stingy all his life and he deserved something when he died.

"He wadn't as stingy as they made out at the trial. What Lloyd and his other children said. He didn't starve us. He kept soup, beans, and bread all the time and eggs and sometimes bacon for breakfast.

"Nearly every week he'd take me to town and when we got ready to leave he'd buy us ice cream. We'd sit under a big oak outside town and wait for the bus. There's a pile of wooden spoons where we waited.

"No, Cotter, was as good to me as he knew how to be. I always heard he starved his first wife to death. That's what Lloyd said.

"The day Cotter died, I woke up and found Lloyd at the stove frying eggs. He had the biggest skillet in the kitchen and must have had 25 eggs stirred up. Another pan he had full of bacon."

She leaned forward wiping her mouth, "I knew something was wrong. Lloyd never gets up until later. I always get Cotter and he lights the stove.

"Catherine, two or three times that ol' man nearly burned himself up. He'd stand back in the middle of the room and throw gas at the coal then strike a match. He'd get gas all over him. I saved his life twice when he was in flames. Now if I had been goin' to kill him, I'd have let him burn, wouldn't I?"

The others came back for dinner and Laurie talked on. "Even Dan" — that's my father — "thought I would be convicted. I could tell from his face. I knew I wasn't, I knew when I went into that court — no matter how long it took, I'd be all right. That's what I told Spence and my neighbors. They wadn't goin' to do anythin' to me."

She dried dishes while I washed.

"Lloyd had been planning Cotter's death a week ahead. He'd been gettin' out lumber. He made Cotter stock lumber for him. I told Cotter he'd better not go. If he did any work — lifting or anything — it made him nervous, his kidneys broke down and at night he'd wet all over the bed.

"He went anyway. He was like a child. You had to tell him everything to do.

"The second day he went back. That evenin' I was sittin' on the porch and he came around the side of the house 'en I saw he'd been cryin'. Then Lloyd came to the side of the house, 'Ol' man,' he said, 'you ain't gonna be here long.'

"Now we didn't know it, Catherine, but he was warnin' us then. Cotter looked at me real pitiful and asked me if I wasn't his friend. I petted him and told him he had always been good to me and I liked him for it.

"And you know, Catherine, I did like him. He wasn't Joe. There's not but one Joe. But he was a good ol' man. But I had to watch him. If I turned my back one minute he grabbed a lamp, a chair, a stick, or anything near and hit me. I had bruises on my arms and legs where I had been hit."

There was a slight pause. "I knew something was up when I saw Lloyd frying that whole pan of eggs — more eggs than he could eat in a week."

And thus, she talked all afternoon. When the school kids came home, I took a novel I had brought home to read, put on a coat, and shut myself in Dad's '62 blue Ford that had set in the sun all day.

Oscar came out and played with the dog. Then he knocked on the car window. "Go away," I told him.

After supper we sat in the living room. Janice mentioned something about a boy she was dating.

"Oh, I fixed Nancy's boyfriend," Laurie said.

Nancy is her grandchild.

"She was courtin' a no-good Rainey boy. His family never had been any good. That evenin' she went to town with Jerry. They'd been gone about an hour when the Rainey boy came to the door. He said, pert, he wanted to see Nancy." She laughed biting her lower lip, her head shaking. "I told him Nancy had got into a car with another boy and left. I didn't tell him the boy was her brother. I really fixed her."

Carl lay sprawled out in his chair, his face drawn, tired from his day's work.

"Os," he said, "You brought your hunting boots, didn't ye?"

"Yeah, they're in a box in our room."

"I'll need them. These don't climb mountains and haul power saws around too good."

Oscar brought him the boots. Dad picked them up and looked at them. "Good leather. What did you give for them."

"Thirty dollars."

Dad picked them back up, felt of the inside, pinched the toes and studied the soles. "Thirty dollars! At Western Auto shoes just like this cost \$18.00. Boy, you got gypped. Where did you buy them?"

"At a sporting store in Portland. They were the best he had."

"Oh, they're good shoes but you gave about twice what you should."

"You have to pay for quality."

"There ain't no reason for being a fool. Thirty dollars!"

The family was giving nervous laughs by this time.

Carolyn said, "Sometimes you pay more for brand names."

"He'll know better next time," Carl said.

Oscar had gone back to reading his book.

"I bought a pair of shoes in Blueridge, once," Laurie said, "And I didn't have them a week when the sole tore off. Shoes ain't no good anymore."

The parents, Benjamin and Jason, and Laurie went to bed.

Oscar sat smoking before the fire. I asked him about the ring on his finger. He pointed to the five stones in it. "These are diamonds. It's a good ring. I gave a lot for it."

"It's very pretty." I told him.

"I once gave a girl a ring with a ruby," he said. "It was a gorgeous thing. You know what she did with it? She hawked it. Hawked it and bought a car. I nearly died."

"Why?" Janice asked. "I would too."

"And what would you do?" He asked me.

"I'd keep the ruby."

"I bought a girl a diamond once."

"You were engaged?"

"Yes — Patsy. She was some girl. She just about drove me nuts but if she were here now, in five minutes, I'd be hers again."

He told us about the time he took Patsy to see his house. The house was a huge, rambling thirty-six room-white-wood building. He had been proud of that old, derelict building. He had great plans. He was going to refurnish the whole house with furniture all in one period.

paint it, and plant trees and grass on the grounds.

He drove Patsy up the hill, overlooking Portland, to his house. He felt excited as he neared the house. He stopped and ran around to open her door and lead her out to a full view, "What do you think of it?"

"That old heap?" She said with a sneer on her face. "I'll never live in that."

"I first saw her driving down Randolph Street. She was in a Jauguar. Her red hair was blowing. She looked sophisticated and wealthy and I wanted her. I asked about her. She was wealthy and engaged to a lawyer whose family was the richest in Portland.

"I was just out of the navy after having my head patched. I bought some clothes from Hart, Schaffner and Marx and went to places I knew she would be.

"One day when she was coming out of the theater—he wasn't in sight, I walked up to her and said, 'I'm Oscar Landy. I've been wanting to meet you for a long time.'"

Then she looked at me for a minute, "And that was that. Soon we were going together. I got a job and bought a GTO, and rented an apartment downtown. Jeess, did I ever fix that apartment. Lived off tuna sandwiches and beer. Her old man didn't like my job, so I got a better one and got her the best diamond I found. She is pretty and, man, does she have spirit. She doesn't give in to anybody.

"One time we were going to dinner. I stopped at a bar -- needed to see a friend of mine -- and was gone for quite a while. She came to the door and motioned for me to come on. I told her I was coming. Fairly soon she was back at the door. I motioned that I was coming.

"When I went out, she had gone. And in the center of the left seat of my GTO she had built a fire. A big hole smothered and smoked.

"Another time when I stayed in a bar drinking and she wanted to leave, I went out and found the car gone. She never did tell me what happened. I finally bribed one of her friends and she told me Patsy had driven the car into Washington and left it in her uncle's garage.

"I loved that girl. And sometimes after quarreling, I'd go sit in my mansion with a gallon of liquor and look down on the lights of Portland, put some 'blues' on the stereo, and drink until I couldn't think anymore."

He was nervous, his hands shaking, and smoking constantly.

"I still love her. The fire, stubbornness that nobody deflates—acts as if she owns the world. God she drove me nuts."

He stopped talking. I asked him, "What is she doing now. Going with anyone else?"

"No, she lives at home. Not long ago I took her out to dinner. But we got so we couldn't meet without an argument. She was the naggingest creature. If I was late she'd snivel half the night. Then I got drunk and lost my job and she didn't like that.

"Every time we met it was pure hell. It got so I almost dreaded seeing her. Then she learned I'd gone out with Sarah. She sniveled about that for a week. But I told her, "If I could have more fun with some other girl—while I

was in hell with her—then why not go out. Was she mad. She wouldn't see or speak to me for a week. I rang and rang, and went to her house. At first she cursed, then she completely refused to see me.

"Then, for revenge, she went out with someone else. I heard about it. All her friends told me.

"Jeess did that ever hurt. I got drunker than all the winos in Oregon, and stayed that way for a week."

He stopped.

"Why can't she go out if you can?"

"But Catherine, that was different. I wanted to go out with Sarah. She was friendly—understood. She knew all about Patsy and I could tell her anything. I needed her. Patsy dated for revenge."

"I don't understand."

"Look, Sarah and I are old friends. I'd go to her apartment drunk or on narcotics and she'd let me sleep on her couch and when I felt better, she'd listen."

"What finally made you break up?"

"I'm not a masochist."

The term startled me, but then, "Yes," I nodded.

"Patsy had money and influence behind her. She didn't care what she did. She knew she had me. She still does."

"Why did you ever start going together?"

He again had that drawn scared look and I feared that perhaps I'd gone too far. But he answered, leaning back in his chair, his arms moving in a circle, "Did you ever see a wild, beautiful bird soaring and wanted to catch, hold, and tame it?"

A long pause.

"What do you think of Sarah?"

"Sarah understands. If Patsy didn't exist I'd probably love her. I was staying with her when Carl and I left to come out here. She cried and complained. Jeess, how I hate good-byes."

Janice said, "If you love Patsy, I don't see why you don't marry her?"

She irritated me and I said without thinking, "Aw, Janice, shut up." And then to him, "I think Sarah is good for you."

"Yes, she is."

Then I noticed Carl, "Carl, go to bed. You'll never get up tomorrow. Poor fellow—guess you're tired."

"I shore am. That's the hardest work I ever tried doing. I ain't got the energy to get up."

Os told him, "Go on Carl. You'll feel better in bed."

"Why don't we all go?" I said.

Carl asked me, "When you going back to school?"

"Monday."

"Just two more days, huh."

Laurie slept with me. She radiated heat and lay quiet and peaceful. I expected her to talk in her sleep but she didn't.

The next morning Laurie woke me talking.

"When I went into the kitchen and saw Lloyd cooking those eggs, I knew something was wrong. I turned around and looked out the window. Then something took me over the side of the head.

"When I came to, I was laying on the floor. Cotter

lay over from me, his foot against Lloyd's chair. Lloyd sat at the table eatin' the eggs.

"I got up and looked at Cotter.

"Lord-have mercy, Lloyd, call the ambulance. He's turnin' blue'. Lloyd kept on eatin'.

"Then my head started hurtin'. The worse pain I'd ever had. But I went to the telephone and called Delsie."

Delsie is her daughter. She lives outside Blueridge.

"That was the last I remember. Delsie said when she got there I had my hands clasped behind my head and was rummin' through the house yelling. "Call the doctor, Cotter's dead."

"Delsie took me to the hospital. They said I had been beaten. Blood clots threatened to form in my neck and head.

"I wouldn't have shot that ole man for nothin'. That nasty brother and sister of his made Lloyd tell those lies. They scared him.

"But my lawyer, Spence is the best in Blueridge. I knew if he couldn't clear me, no one could. I was in his office so often it feels like home."

She laughed and pushed at her hair, "I'll have to marry Spence yet. Cotter had a little over \$40,000 in the bank; Spence gets half of it.

"No," she said, "I've bought me a little house outside Blueridge. Lloyd can have the house, I'll not live there. I moved all my furniture out of Cotter's home. Lloyd was there when the van went to get my things. Lloyd told them the things worth anything were mine. I pointed out my things and they loaded them and we left.

"Mrs. Rogers is my neighbor. She used to be a nurse. She has a little girl. When I feel lonesome, I'll go over to her house.

"All my neighbors tesifying for me is what turned the trial.

"Just had a few witnesses until they all came in of their free will and gave me character references. People from the churches I belonged to when married to Joe and Cotter. They all told what kind of person I was. It pays to lead a good life."

I spent that evening reading in Dad's car. When I found Mom alone I asked her about the trial. She and Dad had gone. She said the trial had been close and Lloyd was not so great a fool as Laurie said.

That evening I heard Laurie talking to herself. She said she'd go to see Lloyd and he'd tell her the truth.

That night Oscar showed us how to stack a deck of cards and various other cheating tricks. Janice, Carolyn, and Os played a few hands until they accused him of cheating. He swore that tomorrow he was getting drunk.

The next day was Sunday and Laurie was going home. I woke when she was dressing and got up to see her off. It was early—seven o'clock. I intended to go back to bed, so I only put on a housecoat. I stood luddled against the stove when Oscar came in for more coffee. His eyes lighted when he saw me.

"Why are you up?"

"Good morning," I told him, "What are you doing up?"

"Carl's going after his pay check this morning."

Laurie was ready to go and I carried her bag into the living room.

Laurie's black dress and coat were costly, and she tied a scarf around her head and pulled on black gloves. She looked distinguished. I saw Oscar staring at her and knew he was surprised. That angered me—Did he think the rest of us couldn't look handsome when dressed?

Dad had a flat tire so he decided the boys could take Laurie on to town.

Laurie talked about how she hated buses and how short the distance was.

Carl surprised me by not offering to take her to Blueridge. Then I remembered, he had no money.

Then Laurie said, "I'll pay the gas if you'd like to go down there and visit my folks."

Oscar jumped up, "How about it Carl?"

"Fine with me."

Oscar did a jig in the living room and ran through the hall, "I'm going somewhere! Going somewhere! Going somewhere!"

In a few minutes he came out again in his olive suit.

That evening I packed to go back to the university. My sister came in and said, "You're not really goin' to quit, are you?"

"No, I guess not."

"I'm glad. You might have turned out like Oscar."

Then Mom came in, "Catherine, I hope you're not goin' to quit school."

"No, no, not at all."

"That's good. Can I help you pack?"

"No, I'm fine. Practically finished."

At night, Oscar and Carlyle still had not come back. Dad decided they had stayed in Blueridge. I hoped Oscar was not drunk and in trouble.

I had to get up early so I went to bed with the rest of the family. It must have been midnight when a car horn blew outside and laughing voices opened and shut a door. Then the car drove off. I heard Dad get up and go to the living room door but the car was gone.

"Couldn't have been Carl and Os," I heard him say.

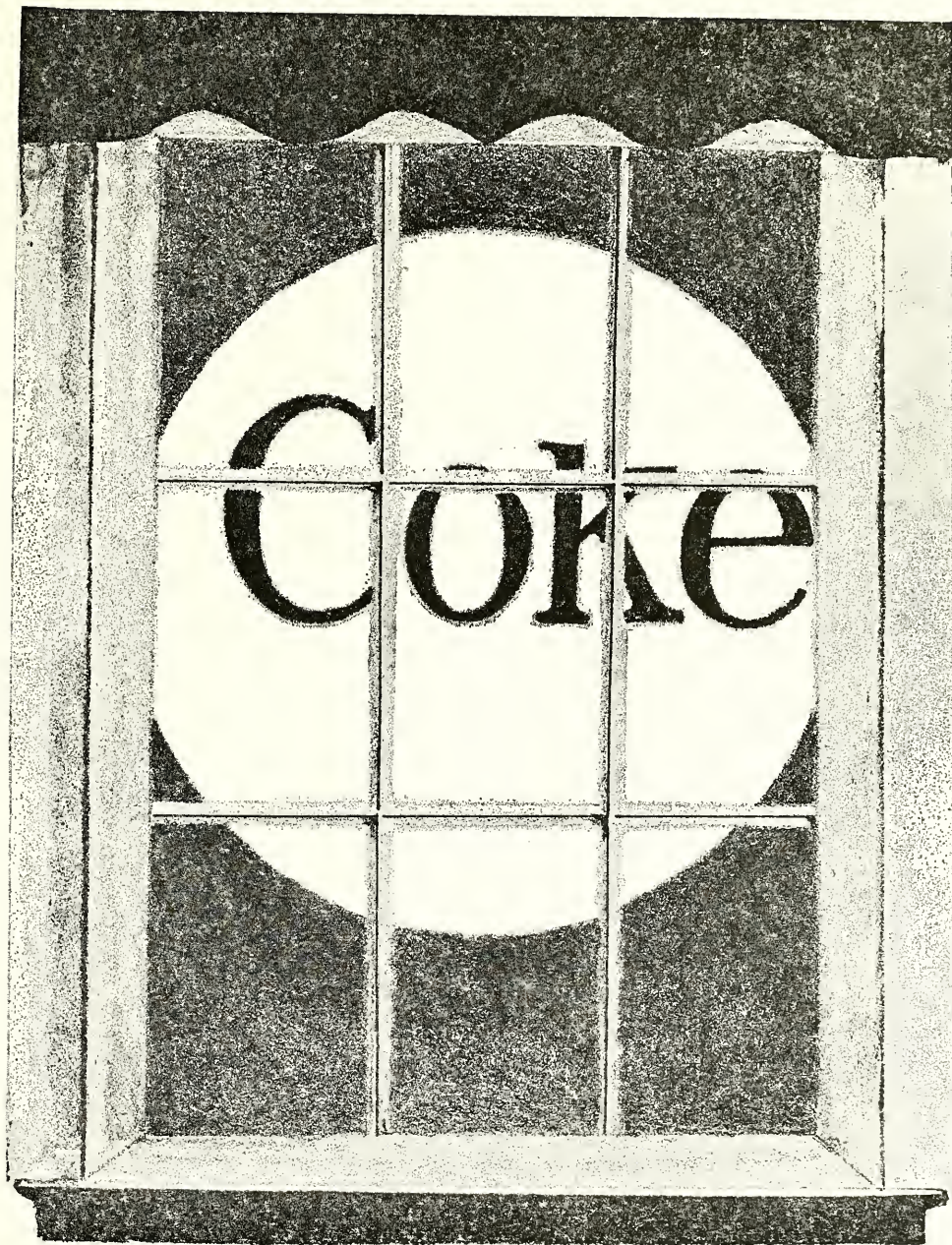
Perhaps it was some of my sister's friends come to see if she was still up.

A month later I wrote from the university and asked what had happened to Carl and Os.

Janice wrote that Carl was staying with them. Os was in Georgia. She and Carl had been down to see him once. He had gained weight and had dirty, broken nails. He had just finished digging an outdoor toilet. Janice had thought that he laughed and talked and was happy. But Carl told her you never could tell—Os was probably miserable—just acting. She wrote later and said that Os had been back to Licklog. Late one night he came in drunk and tried to wake Carl. But Carl sleeps soundly and Os couldn't wake him. Oscar left and Carl slept on.

The next letter said Carl made enough money to go back to Oregon. Oscar was wanted in Oregon for selling narcotics and could not go back — he was in jail in Blueridge for robbing a drug store. He had pawned his ring and stereo.

The next letter didn't mention them.



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